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Files Show FBI Concluded Ray Financed Escape by Stealing

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The FBI concluded that James Earl Ray financed his escape from Memphis, Tenn., after killing the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. through a series of petty robberies and was not bankrolled by co conspirators, FBI files disclosed yesterday.

Internal FBI documents, amassed in the largest manhunt in history, disclosed that Ray was planning a flight to South Africa or Rhodesia a few days before his arrest by Scotland Yard police officers at London's Heathrow Airport on June 8, 1968, two months after King was gunned down on a motel balcony in Memphis.

The FBI reports—made available exclusively to UPI under the Freedom of Information Act—also showed a strong streak of racism and pro-Nazi feelings may have led Ray to assassinate the man who most symbolized black refusal to accept anything but equal status in America.

Just a few weeks before King's murder, Ray and a companion, Charles Stein, drove from Los Angeles to New Orleans and back. In the course of that trip, Ray gave vent to his racial feelings.

There has been speculation that Ray, a drifter who had spent most his life in jail, had been bankrolled by forces eager to silence King.

As recently as June 27, 1974, however, the FBI files showed, the bureau concluded it could find "nothing to indicate that Ray ever received any large sum of money from anyone, and what we know of his living habits both before and after the murder would indicate that he lived on a very limited amount of money.

"We do not know the source of even the smallest amount of money possessed by Ray, but since we know him to have robbed a bank in England after fleeing to that country, it is a reasonable presumption that Ray committed robberies in the United States during the time he was a fugitive," the FBI said.